

NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office
St. Petersburg, FL



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The "News and Notes for Florida Veterans" is published monthly by the Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg, Florida, to provide information on VA benefit programs to veterans and dependents in Florida. The material presented does not have the effect of laws or regulations. Please send questions or comments on this newsletter to Veterans Service Center, ATTN: "News and Notes," PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731. We do not have the resources to maintain a mailing list for distribution to individuals; however this newsletter is available on the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office web site at www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete.

COLA BREAKDOWN OR WHY DOESN'T MY NEW COMP RATE EQUAL MY OLD RATE PLUS 2.3

PERCENT? Every year when the new compensation rates based on the cost-of-living-adjustment (COLA) are announced VA is contacted by veterans who think a mistake has been made in their new rates. They take the old rate and add the COLA increase, and get a result that is different from the announced rates. For example, a veteran rated at 60 percent with a spouse and three children is receiving \$1129 per month effective 12-01-2006. The 12-01-2007 COLA increase is 2.3 percent. When he or she adds 2.3 percent to the old rate the result is \$1154.97. But the new rate is shown as \$1152.00. The veteran wants to know what is going on.

The answer is the way compensation rates and additional amounts for dependents are specified by law and the way the COLA increase is applied.

The law (Title 38 USC Section 1114) specifies the rates of compensation for veterans without dependents. The legislation providing the Cost of Living Adjustment provides that the increase (2.3 percent) be applied to these rates and the results rounded down to the nearest dollar. In the example of 60 percent disability, the rate with no dependents effective 12-01-2006 was \$901.00. Adding 2.3 percent results in \$921.72, which is rounded down to \$921.00.

Title 38 USC Section 1115 specifies additional compensation for dependents for veterans with total disability. The legislation providing the Cost of Living Adjustment provides that the increase (2.3 percent) be applied to these rates and the results rounded down to the nearest whole dollar. For a veteran with 100 percent disability the additional amount for a spouse and one child effective 12-01-2007 was \$240.00. Adding 2.3 percent results in \$245.52, rounded down to \$245.00. The amount for each additional child effective 12-01-2006 was \$70.00 which is increased to \$71.61, rounded down to \$71.00.

For veterans with disabilities of 30 percent or more but less than total, Title 38 USC Section 1115 provides that the

additional amounts for dependents shall be the additional amount for total disability times the percent of disability, rounded down to the nearest whole dollar. In this example, the additional amount for a spouse and one child - \$245.00 - times 60 percent is \$147.00. The amount for each additional child - \$71.00 - times 60 percent is \$42.60, rounded down to \$42.00.

So the new compensation rate for a veteran with a 60 percent disability rating and a spouse and three children is \$971.00 plus \$147.00 for the spouse and first child, \$42.00 for the second child, and \$42.00 for the third child, for a total of \$1152.00 per month.

To summarize, the COLA increase is applied to the basic compensation rates without dependents and rounded down to the nearest whole dollar; and to the additional amounts for dependents of veterans with total disability, again rounded down to the nearest whole dollar. Additional amounts for dependents of veterans with ratings between 30 percent and 90 percent are determined by multiplying the amounts for dependents of veterans with total disability by the percent of disability, and again rounding down to the nearest whole dollar. It's the "rounding down" at each step that causes the final rate to be less than what it would be if the COLA were applied directly to the previous rate.

VA TO HIRE VETERAN EMPLOYMENT

COORDINATORS (VA News Release) WASHINGTON - The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced the initial hiring of 10 full time Veterans Employment Coordinators to focus efforts to attract, recruit and hire veterans throughout the Department. These coordinators will work closely with the recently formed Federal Recovery Coordination Program to assist Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom veterans to potentially obtain employment with VA.

The Veterans Employment Coordinator job announcements will be posted on www.usajobs.gov and www.va.gov/jobs with the goal of being filled by the end of the year. The coordinators will work with veterans interested in employment at the VA, including those who have

one of VA's Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Services programs.

Approximately 31 percent of the 230,000 Department of Veterans Affairs employees are veterans, and 7.7 percent are service-connected disabled veterans.

VA TO EXPAND FLORIDA NATIONAL CEMETERY (VA News Release) WASHINGTON – To ensure veterans in central Florida continue to have access to a final resting place honoring their military service, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has awarded a \$20.2 million contract to expand the Florida National Cemetery in Bushnell. QGS Development Inc., of Lithia, Fla., was awarded \$20.2 million to build additional burial sections and infrastructure at the VA cemetery.

The project encompasses nearly 70 acres, which will provide approximately 41,000 additional gravesites. These will include 20,000 pre-placed crypts for caskets, 4,000 other casket gravesites, 9,000 in-ground cremation sites and 8,000 columbaria niches for cremation remains. The project will also include two new committal service shelters, a public restroom, a storage facility and other improvements. Construction is expected to be finished by late 2009. After expansion, burials for veterans and eligible family members are expected to continue at Florida National Cemetery until about 2020.

Florida's other national cemeteries are Barrancas in Pensacola, South Florida VA in Lake Worth, St. Augustine and Bay Pines. The Barrancas National Cemetery and South Florida VA National Cemetery have space available for casketed and cremated remains. Bay Pines has space available for cremated remains and can accommodate casketed remains in the gravesites of previously interred family members. St. Augustine is closed to new interments, but can bury family members in existing gravesites. In addition to these national cemeteries, VA is planning two new cemeteries in the Jacksonville and Sarasota areas.

VA TARGETS \$39 MILLION TO UPGRADE TAMPA VA MEDICAL CENTER (VA News Release) WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has awarded a contract worth \$39 million to LDV-Doan/Pyramid of Cleveland to upgrade the electrical systems at the James A. Haley VA Medical Center in Tampa. The contract will upgrade normal, emergency and standby electrical distribution systems and can provide 100 percent campus generator backup for four consecutive days.

IMPORTANT DATES IN DECEMBER

December 6 last day to input change of address or establish direct deposit on compensation and pension awards in time for the 12-31-2007 payments

December 19 last day to change or cancel direct deposit on compensation and pension awards in time for the 12-31-2007 payments

December 25 Federal holiday - Christmas

December 31 payments for December due

VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:

VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg - PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731 **1-800-827-1000**

Regional Processing Office, Atlanta, GA (education claims) - PO Box 100022, Decatur, GA 30031-7022 **1-888-GIBILL1 (442-4551)**

Telephone number for Chapter 30 self-verifications **1-877-823-2378**

Veterans Health Administration Toll-Free Hotline (medical care) - **1-877-222-8387**

VA EFT Information Hotline (electronic funds transfer - direct deposit) **1-877-838-2778**

VA Insurance Center, Philadelphia (VA Insurance) - PO Box 42954, Philadelphia, PA 19101 **1-800-669-8477**

VA Health Administration Center (CHAMPVA and Spina Bifida health care) -
CHAMPVA inquiries: PO Box 65023, Denver, CO 80206-5023
CHAMPVA claims: PO Box 65024, Denver, CO 80206-5024
Spina Bifida inquiries and claims: PO Box 65025, Denver, CO 80206-5025 **1-800-733-8387**

Foreign Medical Program Office (medical treatment abroad) -
PO Box 65021, Denver, CO 80206-5021 **303-331-7590**

National Cemeteries

10,000 Bay Pines Blvd N, Bay Pines FL **727-398-9426**
6502 SW 102nd Ave, Bushnell FL 33513 **352-793-7740**
6501 S State Rd 7, Lake Worth, FL 33467 **561-649-6489**
Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL **850-453-4108/4846**

National Cemetery Administration Office of Memorial Programs (headstones and markers) - 5109 Russell Rd Quantico VA 22134-3903 **1-800-697-6947**

Loan Guaranty Eligibility Center (certificates of eligibility) PO Box 20729, Winston-Salem, NC 27120 **1-888-244-6711**

Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) Unit - Chicago VA Regional Office **1-800-829-4833**

INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST:

VA Web Site: **www.va.gov**

VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS) **www.warms.vba.va.gov**

Property Management (sale of VA-repossessioned homes): **www.ocwen.com**

Florida Dept of Veterans Affairs: **www.floridavets.org**

St. Pete Regional Office: **www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete**